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A Tale That Is Told

We spend our years as a tale
that is told.—Psalm 90:9

Andreas Bard

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TO THE READER

There are no ties of blood, no mortal union
To link this yearning spirit unto thine,
But on the heights where eagles hold communion
Our souls are one, their kinship is divine.

THE AUTHOR

FOREWORD

The Bible has told the story of Moses and preserved it in immortal song. We know the author of the decalogue, the prince of Egypt, the peerless leader of the wandering Jews.

But as the poet transcends his verse, the artist his paintings, so the man of action surpasses the drama in which he moves. Look at the writer of the Ninetieth Psalm. What depth of spiritual understanding! What insight into the secrets of the universe! What beauty of diction, what majesty of thought!

We do not wonder that he was lonely. He mingled with the eagles of the crags. He communed with the Most High.

To contact such a mind is inspiration. We cannot reach him on the heights, but on the level of our common humanity we meet him—a man of action, yet a dreamer of dreams; a stern realist, yet at home in God; more gigantic than Angelo's statue, yet as humble as his crib on the Nile!

ANDREAS BARD

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Perspective	13
The Prince of Egypt	17
Solitude	23
The Man of Action	27
The Everlasting Arms	37
Failure and Success	41
The Sphinx	47
Journey's End	55
Sunset	61

THE NINETIETH PSALM

A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God

Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.

In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth.

For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

The days of our years are three-score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Return, O Lord, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants.

O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

PERSPECTIVE

The Sphinx looks out on barren sands,
Where drifting dust piles high,
And sees, in search of promised lands,
The caravan go by.

This is Mount Nebo and the journey's end,
Steep is the hillside and my step is slow.
In years ago with youthful limb I climbed
The heights of Horeb and of Sinai,
For I loved mountains, whence I could review
The rivers, woods and valleys at my feet.

How strange must seem the petty world of men
To eagles soaring over lofty crags!
Our tents and temples, aye the pyramids,
So vast in our conception, are to them
Mere ant-hills, where the busy insects crawl,
Engaged in ceaseless tasks of little worth.
Man's life is like a flood, whose noisy foam
Is silenced soon amid the desert's dust;
Or like the grass so green at dawn of day,
Yet withered in the chill of eventide;
Or like a watch at night, a constant fear
Of death and danger lurking in the dark.
I who have borrowed from Eternity
More than a hundred years of care and toil
Find life a broken sleep, a vivid dream,
A tale of riddles none has ever solved,
A mystic vase containing smiles and tears,
A reaching after stars beyond our grasp,
Brief thrills of conquest, then a deeper void.

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT

They have not passed through life in vain
Who out of smiles and tears
Have formed true values and retain
The heritage of years.
The nobler self will ever rise,
When baser things take flight,
And from the empty dream that dies
Come visions of new light.

Fair was my childhood, though I was adrift
Mid treacherous reptiles in the river Nile,
Serenely dreaming in the little ark,
That held my life. A fragile thing indeed,
This bed of bulrush, daubed with slime and pitch!

But Pharoah's daughter drew me from the flood
And pressed me to her heart. From that day on
I was a prince, known as Thermutis' child,
What royal splendor for a Hebrew waif!

I still am haunted by those early dreams
Of marble columns carved with strange designs;
Of fair-clad children mingling merry songs
With fountain spray and chanting waterfalls.
The lotus flower bloomed on the river's banks!

And I recall the stories of the slaves,
When in the twilight we would pass the Sphinx.
They whispered of the bride, claimed by the Nile,
Until within my mind she seemed to live.
I saw the lovely maiden, doomed to die,
Adorned with fairest flowers and jewelry
From many lands. She raised her slender arms
In supplication to the sunlit skies,
And then descended to the arms of death
Into the wanton flood. I then was young,
And tears welled from my heart and dimmed my
 eyes,
When she had vanished never to return.
So wonderful a vision and so brief!
Her image lived with me, confused desires
Were kindled in the blood and then I knew
The power of passion and the fire of youth.

Those were the early years, when sense is keen,
Responding lustily to glamor's lure.
Life seemed a golden fruit in leafy green,
Sweet to the taste and pleasing to the eye.

At Pharoah's feasts, famed for exquisite foods,
The kingdom's princes would indulge like swine
In savory meat and stimulating drink.
All this to me seemed natural as the air
Of royal splendor which I daily breathed.
But, ere the gorgeous feast had reached its end,
And while the wine was mounting to the cheek,
A slave would enter, carrying a tray
On which was clearly seen, though lights were low,
Crossbones and skull and four large-lettered words:
"Remember thou must die"—my blood ran cold,
An ashen pallor spread on every face,
And laughter's voice was silent as a tomb.
Then from my heart a prayer welled to my lips:
"Teach me, O Lord, to number all my days
That unto wisdom I may turn my heart."
The gods of Egypt were a monstrous sight
With heads of birds and beasts on shapeless forms,
Yet worshipped by an awe-struck multitude.
Their very aspect filled me with disgust.
I looked beyond these idols for the truth.
And then in secret council with the priests
I learned that far above the common thought
There lived the great I AM, one God supreme,
But, being spirit, not within the reach
Of those whose knowledge comes through sight and
 sound.

I have retained this truth within my soul,
The rarest pearl in Egypt's mystic sea.
The little gleam grew brighter with the years,
And now I see it as a cloud by day,
A fiery column in the dark of night;
I voiced my faith in the unchanging prayer:
O God Thou art my refuge evermore!

Then came the fatal day that marked my course.
I often watched the toiling Israelites,
The slaves of Egypt, homeless and oppressed,
Their masters' lash upon the naked backs;
And I remembered that some Jewish blood
Flowed through my veins—an overwhelming
wrath

Dispelled my reason and with one fell stroke
I smote the brute that raised the cruel lash.
What had I done? I still was Egypt's prince,
While challenging the Pharaoh's high decree;
Discovery meant death—and then I fled
Away from royal pomp and luxury
To where above green fields Mount Horeb lifts
Its high, calm peak into the drifting clouds.
There, tending sheep, I let great Nature heal
The lonely soul, crushed by its memories.

SOLITUDE

Softly awakes in heaven's blue dreamland now
The evening star,
And stillness hovers over bush and bough
Near and far;
The moon ascends above the darkling knoll
So tenderly . . .
O for the presence of some kindred soul
To dream with me!

My life was drifting like a broken mast,
Tossed by the waves upon a boundless sea.
What, though the stars were shining overhead
And gently near me flowed the murmuring brook,
I craved the presence of a kindred soul,
To whom I might reveal my inmost self,
More than the soft-eyed sheep within my fold,
Less than the Holy One whose majesty
Gives me a sense of utter nothingness,
And puts the seal of awe upon my lips;
Where could I find a heart to throb like mine,
Responsive to the moods of changing time,
Attuned to weal and woe, to love and loss?
Or was I stranded on the isle of chance,
Shipwrecked, abandoned on a lonely shore?

Then I met Zipporah who was endowed
With all the grace of youth and maidenhood,
But also with a woman's mind that saw
With rare directness things I searched to know.
Among the sweetest moments of my life
I count those treasured hours, when thou wert near,
My perfect mate in body, mind and soul!
With thee the shadows of the troubled past
Dissolved like mountain fog at dawn of day.
Nor did I dread to-morrow, quite assured
That whatsoever happened we would share.
What, though at times the heavens were dark with
clouds,
And she, with sure discernment of my faults,
Would call me* 'bloody', I have learned to know
That even then she judged my soul aright.
And, when two sons were given to our love,
I found my life completed, beyond death
I would be resurrected in my seed.
This was the harbor where the weary ship
Could drop its anchor and forget the world.

*Exodus 4:25

THE MAN OF ACTION

Thou wert born a matchless spirit,
Finding duties, all thine own,
To the temple of the ages
Aim to add thy little stone.

But who can measure strength with destiny,
With Him who guides the stars within their orbs,
Who causes mountains to approach the clouds
And makes the waters bow to ebb and flow?

One day, while wandering through hill and dale,
I saw a bush afire, I heard a voice,
Clear and commanding: "I have chosen thee,
To lead the hapless slaves from want and toil
Unto a land where waves the golden corn
And luscious fruit grows on the river's banks;
There I will build the future of the world."

Reluctantly I heard the strange command,
But something seized me like a holy urge,
As irresistible as when a leaf,
Swept by the wind, moves to an unknown goal.

O mighty Egypt, realm of ancient kings,
Where, though thy fabled wealth amaze the world,
A crafty priesthood preys on ignorance!
Who dares to challenge thy unbroken pride,
And to the judgment seat call thy misdeeds?

I had no armor and no sword or spear,
Naught but a rod, but with the rod a faith,
Strong as the granite rocks on Horeb's heights,
And with this rod in hand I sought the king.

He barely listened to my calm appeal
And, when I finished, thundered fierce abuse
Upon the message and the messenger.
Aye, he defied Jehovah's holy name
And dared the Infinite to strike him dead,
But like the waves that dash against a rock,
His idle boast fell dead upon the air,
For even Pharoah is a broken reed,
When he takes arms against the throne of God.

Plague upon plague laid waste Egyptian lands,
Until at last, affrighted and fatigued,
The king assented that the slaves might go.
I never shall forget that day of days,
When the vast throng of undernourished serfs
Began the slow ascent to freedom's height.
Ill-clothed and filthy, ignorant and base
Like cattle dumb, but suddenly set free,
Though utterly unfit to rule themselves,
They scorned all leadership and discipline.
I wore a despot's mask; but in my heart
A deep compassion for the friendless mob
Has ever been my life's consuming flame.

The colorful procession slowly moved,
Entrusting all to me. From Egypt's plains
They passed through deserts to a world unknown.
I never could have dared to be their guide,
But for the Faithful Pilot at my side.

Or was this a delusion? Was this voice,
I seemed to hear distinctly in my soul,
But a reflection of my own desires?
A star obscured behind a murky sky?
A jewel buried in the slime of sense?
A ray of light, dimmed by imperfect eyes?
So often I have erred, I doubt at times
That God directed me. The pearl of truth,
Entombed in human mud, has to be cleansed,
Ere its inestimable worth is seen.

What burning memories rise in my soul,
When I recall, like thunder from afar,
The distant rumble as of chariot wheels,
And, indistinctly, amid clouds of dust
Saw shining armor glittering in the sun!
Ah, those were warriors, in pursuit of blood,
Bound to return the slaves to Egypt's cage.
How could my unarmed flock resist these wolves?
When flight seemed useless, opposition vain,
And dimmed forever freedom's holy star,
Out of the deep I called unto my Guide,
The Great Invisible; He surely knew
My hopeless plight; in front of me the sea,
Behind me Pharoah's host and no escape.
Then I bethought me of the rod He blessed,
And with a great outbursting of my faith,
Raised it on high and bade the waves to part.

Thou did'st not fail me, God! The waters rose
And, opening their jaws, they formed two walls,
Permitting Israel to pass unscathed.

Say ye, it was the Eastwind's force that drove
The waves apart? But who commands the winds,
And who controls the immemorial sea?
Behind these elements I trace a Power,
A sovereign mind transcending Time and Space.

And, when we reached the further shore, behold,
The host of Egypt plunged into the path,
Left dry and passable for their pursuit,
By dreams of conquest lured to sudden doom!

Deep in my heart I had a steadfast faith
That, more unerringly than pyramids
Rise to the apex from their massive base,
God's purposes direct our mortal schemes.
He would not make a pathway through the waves,
Unless He meant His people to survive;
And, when I saw the onward rushing host
Of Egypt's chariots passing through the sea,
I raised my rod and what I then beheld
Surpasses all my fancy ever dreamed.
For, lo, the mighty waves rose high and fell
Like a destructive deluge on our foes,
Devouring them, and to a watery grave
Consigned the vast array of Pharoah's host.

Alas for those who in the spring of life
Are slain, ere later years have purged their souls
And merged them with the beauty of the Lord!
Here reason stops perplexed, yet what are men
When the Almighty stretches out His hand
To build a newer world amid the wrecks
Of human Babels that obstruct His plans?
Faith is a golden bridge across the chasm,
That would divide the ways of man and God.
I built an altar to the Great Unknown,
Whose presence, surer than the breath I draw,
Though strangely near, remains a mystery.

How else can I explain the dreary march
Through barren wastes of land where neither trees
Nor flowers nor living streams can long abide?
And yet more desolate than desert sands
The hearts of those entrusted to my care!
My life was labor, sorrow and despair,
A vain attempt to carry light and love
To minds, enamored with their brutish selves.
I toiled and fought to kindle sparks of faith
In their degraded souls, to make them see
The fabled land where milk and honey flows,
And, for a generation, yet unborn,
Innumerable blessings from on high.
But ever and again their voices rose,
Rebelliously defying my command.
They cried for Egypt's flesh-pots, cursing him
Who first had turned their eyes to freedom's star,
Away from fertile valleys of the Nile
From sure possessions to to-morrow's dreams.

THE EVERLASTING ARMS

And He who made a mother's tender soul
To guide the infants, struggling helplessly,
Will surely find a haven and a goal
For storm-tost sailors on a starless sea.

Again I sought in mountain solitude
To find my Unseen Guide; each upward step
Removed me further from the murmuring mob,
And made my isolation more complete.
And yet the loneliness I felt within
Was deeper, when I mingled with the crowd
Who, like base animals that seek the mire,
Could find no comfort but in sordid goals.
I kept on climbing, till I reached the height,
Where I could bare my heart in burning prayer
To One, who having made me, understood.

Thus lost in thought, I saw among the crags
A mother* eagle tearing at her nest
That held the fledglings who were loath to fly
And screamingly clung to their mountain home.
Such cries were futile, for the nest was rent,
And cruelly the mother threw them out
Into the vast and threatening abyss.
What startling action on a parent's part!
And then I saw the little eagles fall,
Descending swiftly to the depth below.
Alas, I thought, the struggling brood is doomed,
A victim to the mother's recklessness.
But, when the inexperienced birds grew weak,
I noticed with fixed pinion underneath,
Sustaining them, the larger eagle's wings,
A mother ever mindful of her own.
Victoriously the birds rose to the sun
And viewed the crags from a supernal height.

I learned to see, how God had flung me far
Into a task too vast for mortal step,
But, while I floundered, frightened and dismayed,
Through dark to-morrows, grasping for support,
I found Him near; His everlasting arms
Were underneath me, steady my flight.

*Deuteronomy 32:11

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Not what I am but what I try to be
Sustains my hope;
'Tis not the well-reached goal, but what I see
"Mid darkling pathways which sustains my trust
That the divine lies dormant in my breast—
Success succeeds, but he who fails bespeaks
For his intent the loftier mountain peaks.

I vowed that I would hesitate no more,
But resolutely struggle to the end.

The victories against encircling foes,
Though reassuring to the fickle mob,
Could not remove the evil's deadly core,
Deep-rooted in their hard and thankless hearts.

High on Mount Sinai, where alone with God,
I thought upon the secret source of strength,
Whereby a nation may sustain its course
Unaging 'mid the ravages of Time,
I found the everlasting laws of life,
Not made by man, nor subject to his moods,
Which like a rock support those lost at sea.
Thus slowly dawned upon the searching mind,
In clear response to my unceasing prayer,
Ten mighty principles of ageless truth.
I carved them on two stones and, joyfully
Descending from the mountain, I approached
The restless multitude to give to them
The law which henceforth should direct their path.

But hark! Strange sounds fell on my troubled ear,
The music of the dance, wild shouts of joy,
Weird paeans to the orgies of the flesh;
And, when my eyes beheld the tent-decked plain,
I noticed, rising high above the mob,
A calf of gold, the symbol of revolt,
Of nakedness and greed and monstrous vice.

Forgive, Eternal God, when I shrank back
In boundless fury from this vile display
Of human baseness; this was more than I,
A thing of flesh and blood, could long endure.
I dashed the precious slabs against the rocks
And fearlessly stood 'mid the howling mob,
Demanding that the guilty suffer death.

How many fell I cannot now recall,
But vengeful swords were red with human blood,
Atoning thus for sacrilege and crime.

My wrath seemed just. Had not these people
claimed

The covenanting ark, a pledge that God
Is tabernacling daily in their midst?
How pitifully weak was their response
To the divine appeal! The law, now wrecked
Among the fragments of the golden calf,
Was far too lofty for the little minds
That chose to dwell, like creatures of the slime,
In nameless filth, I now must be content
To teach them, what to eat and how to wash,
And wearily await the larger day,
When like a lily, climbing out of mud,
From carnal somnolence their souls will rise.

Long-suffering Thou art, Eternal God!
This people, chosen to proclaim Thy name,
To find in Thee the light of all the world,
Still bend a servile knee to sticks and stones!
Far nobler is the worship of the Greeks
Who, gentiles all, bow to the mighty Jove
And find in perfumed flower and trees abloom
Some kindly deity. Whoever wills
May hear the still, small voice that guards and
 guides,
But Israel is groping through the dark.

THE SPHINX

We have two souls; one jungle-bred and base,
Fierce remnant of primeval ancestry,
Whose terrifying urge we still can trace
In blinding storms that wreck life's symmetry;
But, rising over passion's lurid night,
Another soul as lofty as the stars,
An ivy in the cellar seeking light,
A rebel who escapes from prison bars.

And even I belong to those who failed!
God chose me as a witness to His truth
And gave me insight into mysteries
Which, when applied, might make the race divine.

I thought His light too bright and softened it
To make it visible for weaker eyes.
As stars may be reflected in a pool
So Heaven might dim its beauty for mankind.
Had not burnt-offerings and splendid tombs,
High altars and the candle's mystic flame
To Egypt's faith become a source of strength?
Perhaps the wisdom of those Pagan priests
Surpassed my humbler way of teaching truth.
And so through codes and ceremonials
I fanned the fancy of the multitude,
Remembering Jacob who in lofty dreams
Beheld a ladder—many little steps
Which very slowly led unto the goal,
The perfect union of the soul with God.

I now look back upon those petty laws,
Innumerable precepts I devised,
That children, through them, might approach the
truth;

But—infants all!—as yet untrained to think
They took the shadow for reality,
The symbol for the truth. Alas, the veil,
Designed to make them dimly see the light,
Became a wall between them and their God.
Yes, I have failed, because the goal was high,
Attempting less I might have been content.

I did not have the grace of Abraham
Who in the dawn of Time plead for the fate
Of wicked* Sodom. Ah, he had a glimpse
Of Mercy seated on the throne of heaven
And, seeing that, gave voice to pity's urge:
"Should not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

*Genesis 18:23

There are still darker memories to crush my soul.
In thought I stood again among the crowd,
That cried for mercy. Thousands had been slain.
Who made an idol of the Golden Calf.
Why should they live? They had defied their God
And for this crime I put them to the sword.
But, ah, how different the scene appears
As I recall it now! My hair is white,
My heart beneath the burden of the years,
Like fruit in autumn, has a mellow tinge,
And pity, rising over passion's fog,
Shines like a star amid dissolving clouds.

How could I make myself the judge of men,
When ever and again I failed to rule
My baser self? I fled from Egypt's court,
Because in anger I had stooped to kill!
I broke the sacred tables, swayed by wrath,
And by this futile gesture forced my step
Back to the mountain height, there to rewrite
What foolishly I dashed against the rocks.

I slew the Edomites and Amalek,
The men of Cana and whatever tribes
Stood in the path of conquering Israel.
I emptied to the dregs the victor's cup
And thought not of the dying and the dead.
Was this Jehovah's will? Alas, my soul
Is rent by doubts and fears. One thing I know,
The lives I took I never can bring back;
Like waves they flowed into a larger sea
Beyond our cheers or tears. What were these men
But creatures nursed in vice and ignorance,
Some chained to tyrants, others born to die
As warriors, sacrificed by worthless kings.

They were but gentiles, but what choice was theirs,
When they received the doubtful gift of birth
In lands of darkness and idolatry?
I wrote—but hardly knew what I had done—
God's everlasting law: Thou shalt not kill!

Are we not linked together in this world*
By toil and tears and trials without end?
Why should men meet in suicidal wars
And make the all-enfolding night of Fate
Still darker with the slaughter of the weak?

*Leviticus 19:18

O Egypt's first-born,* how with the memory
Of youth and childhood slain now sears my mind!
And Midian's helpless† women raise their hands
Accusingly against my dark decree,
To have them killed, because they were not Jews!
Yet doubly terrifying is the thought
That with dim vision and a conscience dead
I made the Lord a partner of my crime.
Strange, is it not, that it was I who said:
Thou shalt not take God's holy name in vain!

I should have tended sheep in Midian
And calmly rested, when the day was done.
With Zipporah, the fair, I might have shared
The glow upon the hearth and in my sons
Have life's sweet springtime vividly retold—
Why did I pause to watch the burning bush
And leave the simpler task for worlds unknown?

*Exodus 12:29

†Numbers 31:17

This is the mystery of human strife:
The goal, when touched, fades out like a mirage.
The new-born child would crawl, the babe would
walk

And youth would run, the man looks to some goal,
While tired old age dreams of the Great Beyond.
Faith is a match for the Impossible
And, ever striving, it will climb the height
Or scorch its wings ascending to the sun.

I see myself as Egypt saw the Sphinx.
Does not this human face, linked to a beast,
Reveal, within us striving evermore,
Discordant elements;? Man is indeed
A thing of clay, charged with the breath of God!
Thus torn asunder, he can never rest.

How plaintive is his voice, how sad the eyes
That sweep the desert for some ray of light!
A fate unbearable but for his gift
Of turning distant skies into a dawn.

JOURNEY'S END

Like a mirage that ever lies
Beyond the eager clutch,
The little earthly paradise
Will vanish at our touch.
Yet, though in sheer futility,
Man's ceaseless quest is spent,
Some hear the call of Destiny
In noble discontent.

My foot shall never tread the Promised Land
Which lures but those who paint a Paradise
Where milk and honey fill their little needs.
Let Joshua lead them! Youthful vagaries
Still stir his soldier heart. Some day he may
Command the sun and moon to change their
 course,
To make his victories the more complete.

For such brave dreams I have both smiles and tears.
Too often I have followed wandering fires
And, disillusioned, floundered through the dark.
Far off I see the fields of promised lands,
The golden corn, the river's winding course,
The Canaan beckoning a hungry herd;
But high above this tempting sight of wealth
There lies a world eternal as the stars,
Out of whose crystal streams my soul renewed
Shall rise and mingle with the Infinite.

Or is this noblest vision a mirage,
Misleading caravans in search of rest?
Sometimes I feel that there is naught in men
That should survive the ravages of death;
They eat and drink and propagate their kind,
No different from the beasts, and yet they see
A life beyond; the wish inspires the thought.
My memory can visualize King Og,
In size a giant but in mind a dwarf,
And all that was remembered of his life
Consisted of a* bed-stead which was big.
Such contemplations break the rod of faith
And make our hopes a plaything of the wind.

O that among the erring race of men
Someone would rise whose soul might mirror God
As yonder mountain lake reflects the sun!
For such a one, not gleaning wisdom's gold
From follies of the past or years ill spent,
But by his firm grasp on eternal life,
Could like a lone star guide those lost at sea
And lead them home. His stainless ministry,
Linked to the truth, would draw our faltering steps
Into the lofty circle of a world
Securely built upon the law of love.

*Deuteronomy 3:11

They wonder that I kept in barren lands
The wandering multitude, when Canaan's wealth
Was within easy reach. Alas, I knew
That riches are more fatal to the soul
Than the acquiring of life's common needs
By ceaseless effort. Often I have seen
That luxury and, its companion, pride
Have so uprooted reason's nobler self
That affluent* Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.
Man's source of strength is found in the Most High.
I raised the serpent† in the wilderness
To voice this truth: Look up and you shall live!

What wasted lives! What piles of useless dust!
I should not boast, for little in my work
Will justify self-praise, but though I erred
And failed in my intent, I never lost
The upward look to those mysterious heights
To which the voice within me urged my step.

Just as a plant climbs to a ray of light,
Or, seeking the unknown, birds cross the waves,
So faith will travel on a trackless course
To find an answer to its deepest prayer!

*Deuteronomy 32:15

†Numbers 21:8

The never-ending caravan of men
Moves through the dust bewildered, yet it moves,
Whence came they and what is the final goal?
God turns them to destruction, and again
They rise to pass into a lightless void.
Where art thou Aaron, whose supporting arms
In days ago upheld me in my prayer?
Where all the warriors whose ashes merged
With desert sand, though victory was theirs?
Where Zipporah, the mother of my sons,
Whose graceful arms, once warm around my neck,
Now lie dissolved in piles of pulseless clay?
Perhaps, 'tis better so. Our nobler part
Is so enclosed in slime that, to be cleansed,
Its pathway leads through death. O God,
Thy* wrath at our pollution but reveals
Thy love for that within us which is Thine!
Alas, my many failures! Yet I know
That every day and all its varied moods
Left in my soul a something none can take,
A clearer vision and a stronger hold
On things eternal. Thus I shall rejoice
That through afflictions and the evil days
That marked my path I climbed through death to
life.

*Psalms 90:9

SUNSET

Bright be the sunset, when the day is done,
And may the wanderer, trudging on alone,
See home light burning as he comes to One
Who evermore is mindful of His own.

Rest calls me from Mount Nebo's lonely height,
Yet what is rest? Unconsciousness and sleep
May lure a stagnant soul, but to my mind
The urge to be inactive is a curse.
No river ever sought its destiny
In pools abounding with decay and slime,
It moves unceasingly, yet tranquilly,
And runs its course with such a show of ease,
That it resembles a rich melody
Whose music merges with the boundless sea.
Serene activity means perfect peace,
And, when my earthly task shall be attuned
To Him whose gracious work is never done,
Then shall my striving spirit find its rest,
Partaking of the beauty of the Lord.

Ye shall not dig my grave nor know its place,*
Lest, like the mummies in Egyptian shrines,
My dust become for some misguided soul
An idol for his prayers. In vain ye seek
The man you knew and, though above his tomb
The stars keep watch or eagles, soaring high,
Scream notes of triumph to the rising sun,
He is not there. Led by the upward look,
His spirit reached the hills that crumble not.

*Deuteronomy 34:6

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